

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued**

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2101

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I come to the floor today to ask for an extension of a very important program to my State—the Land and Water Conservation Fund—and because of that I ask unanimous consent that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee be discharged from and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2101; I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I am very disappointed that last night the Land and Water Conservation Fund expired, and so it has lapsed. I just offered a unanimous consent request to extend this fund for 60 days to make sure there was not a lapse in this important program.

This is a fund that, in my home State of New Hampshire, has been used to ensure the public can enjoy our beautiful environment and our natural spaces, from my home city of Nashua, NH, and Mine Falls Park, which I love to run through every morning when I am in New Hampshire, to our beautiful White Mountain National Forest.

I had the opportunity to come to the floor yesterday with Senators from both sides of the aisle, including my colleague from Montana, Senator DAINES. The Senator from Montana had a wonderful picture of him and his wife in their public lands that have been preserved using the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The picture was of him and his wife hiking. We all understand that a big part of the beauty of this country is our natural beauty, and because of that, the Land and Water Conservation Fund was established in 1965. It was actually established to aid in the preservation of spaces for outdoor recreation across this Nation.

In New Hampshire we have a very strong tradition of the outdoors being such a part of who we are. In fact, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has led to more than 650 individual acquisition and development projects in our State. We very much support the public use of our lands in our State, enjoying their natural beauty, whether it is hiking, fishing, hunting or any number of other wonderful uses we can have of our public lands. So this fund has been very important, and I believe we should not let it lapse.

The law that created the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1965 established that a portion of the revenues coming from oil and gas leasing would be designated for this purpose. So to not extend this fund really is another example, if you look at the fund itself, where portions of these dollars have actually been taken to spend for other purposes in the Treasury, not in accordance with the law. We see that happen too much in Washington. But to let this lapse is very unfortunate.

I am very disappointed my colleague has rendered an objection because this is such a bipartisan issue and something that has done so much for our country—this program—and for my home State of New Hampshire. So I hope in the coming days we will be able to work together to have the Land and Water Conservation Fund program extended and that we can get beyond the partisan objections and get it done so we can work together to preserve the beautiful spaces in this country. This program has done so much for my home State of New Hampshire and for many States across this country, and that is why it has such strong bipartisan support.

Madam President, I am very disappointed that my very reasonable request in asking for unanimous consent to extend this program for 60 days until we can get to the long-term permanent authorization—which I support and I have cosponsored, and I think that is what we need to do in the long term—has been objected to. To let this lapse is completely unacceptable when it has been such a strong program in allowing everyone in this country to enjoy our public lands, to enjoy the great outdoors in the greatest country on Earth.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I want to talk for a few minutes about the discussion we are having about whether to have a discussion. The debate we are having about whether to have a debate is always amazing to me. How far we have moved in such a short period of time from the way the Congress always did its work. The way you set your priorities, both at home and in the government, is how you spend your money. You might think that is not the way you set your priorities, but if you think something is very important to you and your family and you find out you are not investing any money or time in it, it is probably not all that important. It is probably something you have decided is a good thing to say is very important.

This is the process we go through in the government to talk about what our

priorities are. What could be more significant in our priorities than the bill that I would like to see us take up today, the VA-Military Construction bill, the bill that determines lots of things about not only people who serve in the military but what is available for their families, and what kind of support structure there is, and then with the Veterans' Administration, what is there after they serve, how are we meeting that commitment we made to our veterans that if they serve for the government—and we are grateful, so we should then make sure we are always there to do what the American people have told veterans we would do if they served.

We have already had votes not to go to the Defense appropriations bill—a bill that is about the same amount of money the President asked for and what the President said was needed to defend the country, but apparently there is some balance somewhere in the world—that I am not aware of—that no matter how much it costs to defend the country, you have to spend that much money on other things that don't defend the country; that there is a balance between what is happening in Syria today and how many employees the EPA needs or how many employees the IRS needs. Obviously, that is something that doesn't make sense to people. It doesn't make sense to me, but we couldn't get the four additional votes we needed to go to the Defense appropriations bill. I guess in a world where the President said he is also going to veto the Defense authorization bill—not because of what it authorizes but because of the money that eventually the appropriators would have to spend—people have to wonder what is going on. The No. 1 priority of the Federal Government is to defend the country, and following that priority, our obligation is to those who serve in the military and their families. That is what the Military Construction bill would do. It actually spends a little more money than we spent this year. That appears to be everybody's complaint; that somehow the government is not spending enough money, but the Appropriations Committee took the amount of money that the law allows, and the Budget Control Act did a good thing in terms of keeping spending under control. That is one of the few things that has happened in Washington, DC, in a long time that actually did put a lid on spending because it actually put a lid on spending. It actually says in the law how much money we can spend this year on discretionary spending. The Appropriations Committee, with Republicans in charge for the first time in a long time, did the work for the first time in a long time. In fact, this is the first year in 6 years that the Appropriations Committee voted all the bills out of committee, marked up all of the bills, cut places where the committee thought should be cut, increased places where the committee thought should be increased, and this at a level that the law

allows, but apparently the law is not good enough for our friends who always want to spend more money. It is not even good enough to debate the bills that come out at the level of the law, to let those be amended, and to let that work be publicly done.

This worked pretty well for a long time. I think initially there was probably one spending bill, but I think in the tradition of Congress, that was the one bill that in both the House and the Senate we were able to debate as long as we wanted to, until everybody was worn out, offering their ideas as to how to spend the money better or not spend it at all. The House has continued to do this, except for a couple of years under Speaker PELOSI, on the half dozen big bills of the 12 spending bills we have now, and they traditionally have 200 or 300 amendments on each of those bills on how to spend the money. Some of those suggestions were not to spend it at all. What could be healthier than that? The Senate is not allowed to do that. At the end of the day, we are saying: Let's debate these bills. Let's, of course, debate the bill that defends the country. Let's debate the bill that takes care of those who do defend the country.

This bill includes \$5.5 billion more than was spent last year. I don't recall hearing a hark and cry—when this bill finally gets passed as part of one big not very appealing package—from anyone saying that we were not spending nearly enough on military construction or veterans programs last year, but even though we are spending \$5.5 billion more than we spent last year, some are saying it isn't nearly enough to spend this year. The committee thought it was enough.

In fact, this bill was voted out of committee—and remember this committee has Democrats and Republicans on it—with a vote of 27 to 3. Eleven Democrats and all the Republicans said: This is the best way to spend this amount of money—\$5.5 billion more for these purposes than we spent last year. Let's vote this bill out so it can be debated on the Senate floor. Here we are months later, still trying to get 60 Senators to agree to have that debate. Actually, I think we are trying to get five Senators to agree to have that debate because all of the Republicans, and one Democrat, appear to be willing to move forward on these defense funding bills, but there is not enough on the other side. If we could get half of the Democrats who voted for the bill in the committee, we would have the votes we need to have this debate and talk about spending money.

Eventually the government has to be funded, and we should all understand that if we don't do it this way, the alternative is that it will be funded in absolutely the worst possible way as one big bill with no debate and having to settle on some desperate decision at the end of the year in order to keep the government funded because we do have to defend the country.

I am not arguing with the decision that ultimately has to be made to defend the country. I am not arguing with the decision that ultimately has to be made to have the military installations that allow that to happen with military construction. I am not arguing with the decision that has to be made for the veterans affairs part of our government, including veterans' health—mental and physical—behavioral health, and other health, to be funded properly, but why aren't we debating on that today?

What would be wrong with debating this bill? If you were not one of the 27 Senators on that committee—so 27 percent of the Senate has already voted on this bill. Let's send it to the Senate floor and vote on it. If you are not one of the 27 Senators who voted for it or one of the 3 who voted against it, bring your ideas to the floor. That is how this process is supposed to work. Your ideas may be better than what is in the bill, but we will never find out if we are not allowed to debate it. This is regrettable for veterans and their families. We see a Veterans' Administration that is not doing what it ought to do.

A year ago, the President said the Veterans' Administration was the best funded part of "his government," but now there is not enough money. Suddenly there is not enough money. The President thought there was enough money a year ago, but apparently there is not enough money now. The real issue is that there is not enough commitment to veterans and the Veterans' Administration. We could have that debate here too.

Over the last year, we have moved a long way toward giving veterans more choices, more options, and more places to go to get their health care. That system is in its fledgling stages, and it ought to be debated as we talk about how to spend money that would be spent on the Veterans' Administration, but we can't debate and vote on it if people aren't willing to have the vote it takes to have that debate. We ought to be getting back to the way this process works transparently and the way it works constitutionally. We need to have this vote today. We need to get to the Defense appropriations bill.

Earlier this week, we had a vote—which I didn't support—to move forward for a few more weeks with last year's spending. Last year's priorities only work for so long. Just a couple of years ago, we had the situation where the Budget Control Act had to go into effect—and it went into effect because Congress didn't do its job and ended up appropriating more money than the law would allow—and that required line-by-line cutting, the sequester, which is not a necessary part of that law at all. It is only a part of the law if the Congress violates the law, and the Congress violated the law. The President signed the bill, and then we had to do the line-by-line cutting.

We brought the leaders of our military in to talk about this, and none of

them were for line-by-line cutting. Who would be? That is the worst possible way to reduce spending because you are not making any choices, you are just admitting that you can't make any choices, and so everything gets cut everywhere. Every one of them said this is a big problem, but an even bigger problem in almost every case is the sequester. In fact, Admiral McRaven of Special Ops said that an even bigger problem than the sequester is the continuing resolution because we were cutting lines of a budget that might have met the military needs 5 years before, but it hasn't been updated for 5 years.

Let's have this debate. Let's move beyond saying that we can't decide how to spend the money to debating how to spend the money. Let's have a defense structure that works for 2015 and 2016, not a defense structure that might have worked for 2010. One of the great frustrations the people we work for have with us today is they believe this is not all that complicated, and they are right. How complicated can it be? We were elected to the Senate so we could take positions and vote, so let's take positions and vote. The debate we should be having is about moving forward on these critical issues.

I hope our colleagues will join us today. I hope there are 60 Senators who will say: I am ready to have this debate. I am ready to defend the country. I am ready to take care of those who defend our country and their families and veterans and their survivors. And that is what this budget is all about.

How anyone can walk onto the floor and say they don't want to deal with this now and put it off a little while longer is disappointing to me and to lots of people.

Let's get our work done.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I come to the floor to urge my colleagues to pass the 2016 Military Construction appropriations bill. This bill has a \$4.2 billion increase over last year's level.

We passed the MILCON-VA bill out of the full Appropriations Committee by a vote of 21 to 9, with Democratic Senators Leahy, Feinstein, Udall, Schatz, and Baldwin all supporting that bill and with 16 Republicans backing it.

We now have record levels of funding to fix the backlog of disability claims at the VA. We took construction out of the hands of the VA and gave it to the Army Corps of Engineers so that we never have cost overruns like at the Denver hospital again. The bill also bans funding for Glenn Haggstrom, the bureaucrat responsible for spending

\$930 million over budget in Denver. The bill provides new protections for whistleblowers, especially for doctors and nurses not protected by the Whistleblower Protection Act.

By voting no on this bill, Members will be voting against a \$4.2 billion increase for our veterans.

Thank you, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

#### TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President, I rise today to speak about a subject matter I touched on about a month ago regarding current trade negotiations.

I don't blame elected officials for pushing legislation, policy proposals, or ideas that further their home State's interests. In fact, I think that is one of the first things we should do here, that is, to make sure the folks who elected us know we are standing up for them.

But I also think there comes a time when we need to recognize that the long-term interests of our collective constituents are at risk, even when we are doing short term things that put us at risk.

This is why I have decided that I wish to speak a little bit about the current status of the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP negotiations.

I learned overnight and this morning that the American team of the TPP negotiators has tabled language which would carve certain American-grown commodities out of the protections of the trade deal's investor-state dispute settlement—or ISDS—mechanism.

By carving out tobacco from the TPP, the President and his administration are discriminating against an entire agriculture commodity, setting a dangerous precedent for future trade agreements.

I rise today to defend the farmers, the manufacturers, and the exporters from the discriminatory treatment in this proposed trade agreement. What they have decided to do right now relates to tobacco. Today it happens to be about tobacco, but I will do this for any crop now and for any agriculture commodity for any State going forward in the future. This is not just about tobacco. This is about American values and fairness.

In July I stood on this same floor and I discussed this same issue. I went out of my way to emphasize that I believe free trade is good. That is why I voted for trade promotion authority. A balanced trade agreement will benefit all of us.

I also recognize that the United States over the years has tried to do more with these agreements than merely haggle for market access or tariff reductions. Over the past 30 years, the United States has consistently imported certain components of our American system into these agreements, including due process protections, dispute settlement procedures, and the protection of private property rights.

These are now standard terms that those who engage with the United States at the bargaining table know are not negotiable.

They never have been—that is, until yesterday.

Our negotiators have now concluded that while some investors are entitled to equal treatment under the law, others aren't. What our negotiators have proposed sets the stage for the remainder of this negotiation and for those deals which will be negotiated in the future, such as the agreement with Europe and future agreements with African nations.

Our trade agreements are now apparently nothing more than laboratories for setting partisan policies and picking winners and losers. If we condone this kind of behavior, how can we be assured it will ever end?

As I stated in July, once we allow an entire sector to be treated unfairly, the question is, who is next? Is it the beef industry in Nebraska? Is it the pork industry in States such as Iowa and North Carolina? Is it the poultry industry in Delaware, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia?

We need not look far to find protracted, heated policy debates about any number of issues that affect trade—the consumption of coal, energy exploration practices, the use of pesticides, the use of biotechnology. The right place for those debates is in bodies like this one, not in trade agreements. The wrong place is what is going on right now with our trade negotiators and the members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

I hold a sincere belief that unfair treatment for one agricultural commodity significantly heightens the risk that more unfair treatment for another commodity lurks around the corner.

I have no choice but to use this forum to make two very important points and make it very clear to the negotiators as we reach the final stages of the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations.

First, I would like to speak to process concerns. A failure to abide by the process and the terms governing the process as established by the TPA is unacceptable. When I state that I have no choice but to use the Senate floor to make these points, I mean it.

A full 8 weeks ago, I wrote to our Trade Ambassador cautioning him about this course of action and requesting that he consult with me as he was statutorily obligated in the TPA to do.

To explain to those in the Gallery, we passed a bill that said we wanted to provide the President with trade promotion authority. We wanted to empower representatives of the United States to negotiate with trading partners who are in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We wanted to support that, over the objections of many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

We also set certain ground rules for being able to do that. They had to re-

view with Congress some of the proposed items of the agreement that may be the most contentious about intellectual property, about the carve-out. But to date I have had absolutely no additional communication from the Ambassador or his designees. In other words, it has been lights out.

In fact, I would ask any Member of the Senate whether they honestly know what currently is in the TPP agreement that is being, in my mind, pushed forward and pushed to a point where we will just have a simple up-or-down vote. I think this abuse of the process is in violation of the letter and the spirit of the TPA.

The last time anybody spoke to me regarding this particular provision that has to do with the carve-out, I was told it is something our partners were insisting on. The actions of the last 24 hours—namely, that the United States actually tabled the language in question—really raises serious doubts about that assertion.

Second, I want to speak to the growing view that the TPP is not being negotiated in accordance with the substance of the TPA. The failure to abide by the substance of the provisions of TPA puts the privileged status of the proposed treaty at risk, and it is something I am going to spend a lot of time focusing on.

I would remind this body that we have already, in a bipartisan fashion, disavowed language that treats some products differently. In the TPA, Congress said that opportunities for U.S. agriculture exports must be “substantially equivalent to opportunities afforded foreign exports in U.S. markets.” Congress has stated that dispute settlement mechanisms must be available across the board, not selectively.

I voted to give the President trade promotion authority to allow trade agreements such as the TPP to move through Congress in a quick, orderly, and responsible fashion. Congress granted the President trade promotion authority with the mutual understanding that his administration would negotiate deals in good faith. I did not vote to give the President and the administration the freedom to indiscriminately choose when fairness should be applied and when it should be ignored.

If the President chooses to arbitrarily ignore TPA provisions he doesn't like, then Congress is not obliged to honor the fast-track status. If any carve-out is ultimately included in the TPP, I will work hard to defeat it.

I might add that our own majority leader has expressed concerns over this and has expressed the same sentiment to the trade negotiation team.

In closing, I wish to offer this to anyone who believes my sticking up for tobacco or this particular provision or for equal treatment and American values is shortsighted: I want you to know that I would do it for beef in Nebraska,

for pork in Iowa, for poultry in Delaware, for any farmer who is being unfairly carved out as a result of the administration's desire to put provisions in a trade agreement that simply shouldn't be there, and which have not been there historically.

So to the Members of the Senate and to the American people and the farmers out there, I want you to know I am going to continue this fight. I am going to continue this fight not because it satisfies a home constituency, but because I intend to protect the free trade ideals that have made the United States the most desirable trading partner in the world.

Thank you, Madam President. I also want you to know that I think there is a growing sense of concern—whether it is Senator HATCH, Senator McCONNELL, or a number of other Senators—that regardless of how they feel about this particular issue with tobacco, the provision in such a trade agreement is unacceptable. I hope our trade negotiators recognize that we are focusing a lot of attention on this, and they risk putting together a good trade agreement that we would all like to get behind as a result.

Thank you, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The Senator from New Hampshire.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2101

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, for 50 years the Land and Water Conservation Fund has done amazing work protecting our land, waterways, forests, State parks, and critical wildlife habitats. This is particularly true in New Hampshire, where since 1965 LWCF has funded more than 650 individual projects. Just this month, New Hampshire received eight new LWCF grants, which will allow New Hampshire communities to develop outdoor recreation facilities in Dover, which is close to where I live, to renovate Osgood Pond in Milford, and to do so many other projects.

In the last couple of months, I actually had a chance to go around New Hampshire and visit so many of these projects that were done because of LWCF grants. One of the things that really struck me about them is that they are not for big projects, although some have been used toward doing that. The Silvio Conte National Wildlife Preserve that crosses Vermont and New Hampshire is one of those that have been preserved, with the help of Judd Gregg, a former Republican Senator from New Hampshire. LWCF helped to preserve that.

So many of these grants have been used for small projects and communities, such as Meredith in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire on Lake Winnepesaukee, where I visited. They have been able to expand the park along the lake so that people not only from Meredith but from across the State and other parts of the country when they are visiting can come and sit and enjoy the water. With those

projects, they have been able to put in new docks so that people can get out on the lake on boats and enjoy the water. Without LWCF, those projects would not have been possible. It gets people out into the outdoors who otherwise wouldn't be able to do that.

Federal and State LWCF funds are also vital to the outdoor recreation industry in New Hampshire. That is one of our biggest industries. It accounts for \$4.2 billion in consumer spending, \$1.2 billion in wages and salaries, and nearly 50,000 jobs. The importance of these projects and the conservation efforts that are the result of LWCF to the tourism sector of our economy and to our outdoor industry cannot be overstated.

There has been bipartisan support for LWCF since its inception back in the 1960s. There is a bill which Senator BURR has introduced and which I am a cosponsor of that would extend LWCF for 60 days. Unfortunately, last night LWCF expired. Its authorization ended as of September 30.

The effort to reauthorize the program, to invoke Senator BURR's bipartisan legislation, was defeated. When they objected to a simple short-term extension of LWCF, our Republican friends indicated it was because they believed most LWCF funding goes to Federal land acquisition. Well, I would like the RECORD to reflect that is just not the case. I have seen it firsthand in New Hampshire in the projects I talked about. I would bet the Presiding Officer has seen in North Carolina the support LWCF has provided. In fact, during the last 10 years, LWCF funds have been split about 50-50 between Federal agencies and States. In New Hampshire, what these Federal grants do is to leverage State support and private support and local support.

Moreover, most Federal lands that are acquired with LWCF funds are within the existing boundaries of Federal parks, refuges, forests, and other recreation areas. Consolidating these lands helps to reduce Federal maintenance and management costs, saves taxpayer dollars, and enhances the experience visitors have to these areas. For example, in 2014, 39 of 40 LWCF national forest acquisitions expanded access to property already managed by the Federal Government that had been previously closed to the public. This is not about keeping the public off these lands, this is about helping to ensure that members of the public can get on these lands and benefit from them and enjoy them.

This Senator is very disappointed that we have seen a few people blocking the extension of this program in a way that affects every single State in this country. Our failure to act has significant consequences for each and every State.

The expiration of this program jeopardizes access to public land for hunting and fishing, which is one of the great benefits we have in New Hampshire that we use these lands for. It

prohibits access to other outdoor activities that are important and unique to our American heritage. This is going to adversely impact our Nation's outdoor, recreation, conservation, and preservation economy. In New Hampshire, our whole outdoor industry is affected. That outdoor industry contributes over \$1 trillion to our Nation each year, and it supports millions of American jobs.

I think it is critical that we pass a short-term extension to keep this program operating, but ultimately what we need to do is to pass a bill that permanently reauthorizes and fully funds LWCF—something a bipartisan majority of this body supports doing. I am going to continue working to pass a permanent authorization. I know that Senator BURR; my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator AYOTTE; and other people who are on this bill feel the same way.

In the meantime, we should not allow LWCF to lapse any longer. So this Senator is going to renew a unanimous consent request that was made last night by my colleague from New Mexico, Senator HEINRICH, to pass a 60-day extension.

I recognize that this request is going to be objected to by Senator LANKFORD, whom I see on the floor, but I just want to remind us all that less than 2 weeks ago, 53 Senators wrote the Senate majority leader urging action to reauthorize LWCF. To the 12 Republican Senators who signed that letter, I say this: I hope you will work with us to correct the misconceptions and the mischaracterizations that exist about this program. Let's work together so we can allow this short-term extension to pass. Let's work together to get a long-term reauthorization for the Land and Water Conservation Fund because LWCF has expanded outdoor opportunities in every single State in the country.

We should come together to support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to protect one of America's most essential tools for conservation and economic growth.

With that, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee be discharged from and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2101; and I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I do object to this bill moving forward by unanimous consent today. The issue is that this bill needs reform. I enjoy our national parks. My children enjoy our national parks.

Twenty-nine percent of the United States is already under Federal ownership. Twenty-nine percent of all of the United States is under Federal ownership. A significant portion of this—in

fact, last year \$306 million was spent from the LWCF, and \$178 million of that was for new land acquisition.

So the bulk of what this program is used for is for new land acquisition. But the real issue to address here is not only what happens if we allow it to lapse but what happens with it day to day. The day-to-day operation of the LWCF is for new land acquisition or for putting money into a State grant to be able to have them buy new facilities, not to maintain them.

We are not setting aside the money to be able to maintain this. We have an \$11.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog at our national parks right now. The new additional dollars that are used for land acquisition are used to be able to pick up new properties and not to be able to maintain what we currently have. So the challenge that I have is this: Why don't we look at this fund in a new way? Why can't we take care of what we already have and not just focus on acquiring new properties?

To leave the LWCF as it currently is would be something akin to saying: I want to buy a new car, but I don't want to set aside money to actually put gas in it. I just want to have the new car.

Well, if we are going to have that property, we better take care of it. Currently, the Federal Government is a terrible steward of the land we have. Now, as far as this program and reauthorizing it right now, we checked with the Congressional Research Service. If this program is not reauthorized currently, the program continues. The program currently has \$20 billion in reserves right now—\$20 billion.

Last year, \$306 million was spent. The year before, \$306 million was spent in LWCF, meaning in current status, right now, if we do not put a single dime into LWCF for the next few years, we will only have 65 years of reserve left in this program. It is not a crisis that we need to fix immediately. This authorization does not keep the program going. This authorization means we are not adding new money to the \$20 billion already in reserve.

I think we have at least 64 years to be able to work this out and a 65-year reserve. I can't imagine it would take that long, but with the Senate, everything seems to take too long. What we are looking for is pretty straightforward and simple. Let's spend some of these dollars to be able to focus on not just buying new properties but on actually taking care of properties that the U.S. Government has the responsibility to actually be able to maintain. It is to reform this program in the days ahead and to make sure that we are managing land well, not just adding new land all the time.

So with that, I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I would be all for taking the backlog of funding and putting it into LWCF. I think my colleague raises some real re-

forms that could be made to LWCF. In fact, there is legislation in the comprehensive energy bill that Senators MURKOWSKI and CANTWELL have passed that would make some of those reforms. But if we can't get to that, if we can't extend this program in the short term, we are never going to get to that point.

The fact is that the backlog of maintenance needs should be addressed. But it does not make sense for us to suspend the program while we address those needs. LWCF was not established for maintenance purposes. It was established to protect natural areas and to provide recreation opportunities to the American public.

When I went to the city of Nashua, the second largest city in New Hampshire, and walked with the Republican mayor along the Riverwalk that they are trying to establish there, what I heard from her was what a critical difference LWCF made to the city and being able to leverage funds that the city put in and that the State could put in to help make sure that the people of Nashua, many of whom cannot get to national parks or to the White Mountains in New Hampshire but they could get to the Riverwalk through downtown Nashua.

Those are the kinds of projects that LWCF goes to help fund. Some 99 percent of what Federal agencies spend goes to acquire inholds, those pieces of land that are already within the boundaries of a national park, a national forest or a national wildlife refuge that if sold to a private developer would block public access. It would damage park resources. It would harm the visitor experience, and it would make it harder to maintain those very projects that my colleague was talking about wanting to maintain.

So I think, while it sounds simple to say there is a backlog and we should not reauthorize this program, that is only half the story. It is very disappointing that with the strong bipartisan support this legislation has, with the need to reauthorize it to continue to protect special places in the country, we are seeing opposition from a very few people in this body who are able to block our moving forward.

#### NOMINATION OF GAYLE SMITH

Mr. President, I would like to, if I could, move on to address a different issue, and hope we will see some cooperative agreement at some point in the future. I also want to urge the consideration of the nomination of Gayle Smith to serve as the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, also known as USAID. I am here with my colleague Senator COONS from the Foreign Relations Committee to talk about this nominee because this is a non-controversial nominee, a seasoned public servant for a position that should be above partisanship.

So it is really disappointing that, again, there is only one person in this body who is holding this up. This

comes at a particularly difficult time because we are witnessing a humanitarian crisis in Syria and across the Middle East. It is a crisis that grows worse every day. Our European allies are struggling to cope with a massive refugee and migration crisis without precedent since World War II.

The United States, with our unparalleled capacity to mobilize humanitarian support for humanitarian relief, has played a leading role, but there is more that we can do to assist both the Syrian refugees and the neighboring countries that are hosting them to help with that humanitarian crisis. But our ability to respond effectively to these challenges is hampered by the inability of the Senate to vote on Gayle Smith's nomination to lead USAID.

So, again, nearly 4 months have passed since she appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The committee approved her nomination by a voice vote in July. But since then, there has been no attempt to bring her nomination to the Senate floor, even as these humanitarian crises have deepened and deteriorated. It is not only our operations in the Middle East that are being hampered, USAID currently operates in more than 60 countries and regional missions around the world.

Following the devastating earthquake in Nepal in April, USAID disaster response teams were among the first crisis personnel to deploy there to organize the humanitarian response. USAID personnel continue to support our development efforts in Afghanistan. Those efforts are critical to the long-term success in the country. Given the extraordinary humanitarian crises confronting the United States, confronting our allies in the world, we really need a leader in place at USAID. It is unconscionable that here we are 4 months later and she is still being stalled.

Gayle Smith is a superbly qualified nominee who will almost certainly be confirmed by an overwhelming bipartisan vote. The Senate deserves the chance to vote on this critical nomination. So, again, I urge the majority leader to bring her nomination to the floor. We discussed it again today in the Foreign Relations Committee. I know my colleague from Delaware can speak also to what we heard in the Foreign Relations Committee.

So I would yield to my colleague from Delaware to discuss what we have heard in the Foreign Relations Committee about Gayle Smith and the need to put her in place as leader of USAID.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, confirmation and expiration are issues before us today. As we have heard from the Member from New Hampshire, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which we both serve, months ago considered the nomination of Gayle Smith to be the next Administrator of USAID. Today, 60 million people

around the world are displaced, either within their countries or as refugees spreading throughout the world.

It is the single greatest refugee crisis since the end of the Second World War. Gayle Smith came before our committee and received commendations and plaudits from Republicans and Democrats for her long experience as a journalist, as a leader in humanitarian agencies, as a member of the National Security Council, as a cofounder of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, and as a seasoned and senior leader who can help bring strong leadership to USAID at this difficult and important time.

Four months later, she has yet to be confirmed by this body. We have broad bipartisan support for this nominee yet fail to move her forward due to a hold by one Member. I think this points to a longer challenge that this body faces because you also heard from the Senator from New Hampshire of an attempt to move forward the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which yesterday expired.

**BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM  
AND CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS**

Mr. President, I cannot yield without commenting on how hard I worked in the previous Congress to get reauthorized two critical programs, a bulletproof vest partnership program that for years provided tens of millions of dollars to State and local law enforcement for lifesaving bulletproof vests, and a reauthorization effort I led for years—both of these with bipartisan support—to restore authorization to child advocacy centers—centers that critically support families who have been harmed by child abuse and allow local law enforcement to pursue effective prosecutions.

It is unconscionable that this body yesterday, September 30, allowed the Land and Water Conservation Fund to expire, allowed a whole range of child nutrition and school lunch authorizing programs to expire, and allowed the James Zadroga 9/11 first responders act to expire. One of the very first bills I cosponsored and was proud to support as a new Senator 5 years ago was the James Zadroga 9/11 first responders act, which provides support for those who raced to the site of the 9/11 catastrophe, risked their lives, and today suffer lasting health effects from it.

The idea that this body allowed that funding to expire yesterday and that many of the folks who are the beneficiaries of that fund now face the extinction of their medical support is unacceptable to me. So before I yield the floor, I simply wanted to commend my colleague for raising the issue of Gayle Smith's nomination at this unique time of global humanitarian challenges.

USAID cannot effectively do its job without a confirmed leader. I remind everybody in this body that when we fail to work together, when bills expire, it has real consequences, not just for humanitarian issues overseas but

for our own first responders who we are pledged to support. I say it is a shame on this body that we allowed the 9/11 James Zadroga first responders act to expire, that we allowed the authorizing statutes for the summer lunch and school lunch programs to expire, and that we have allowed the Land and Water Conservation Fund to expire.

It is my hope that we will begin to work together in this place and to stop allowing nominations to rest for months and to stop allowing the expiration of valuable statutes that underlie our security at home and abroad.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 5 minutes, after which point I will be followed by the Senator from Montana.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

**RUSSIA**

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, 3 years ago when President Obama's opponent said that Russia was our chief geopolitical rival, President Obama chuckled and said: "The 1980s called and they want their foreign policy back."

Well, now the 1930s are calling President Obama, and they want their foreign policy back. Yesterday was the anniversary of Munich. How fitting that Russia conducted its first major military operations outside of its near abroad since the end of the Cold War on that anniversary in Syria yesterday, because the President's foreign policy has invited exactly this kind of provocation all around the world. President Obama and Secretary Kerry keep saying that they don't know what Russian intentions are, that they don't know Russia's goals are in the region.

It is very simple. So let me lay it out clearly. Russia is an enemy. Vladimir Putin is a KGB spy who views the world as a zero-sum game. In the short term, he intends to prop up his tyrannical ally Bashar al-Assad, and he wants to preserve access to his expeditionary military bases outside of his country.

In the medium term, he wants to either preserve Assad or he wants to replace him with a like-minded ally. He wants to diminish the power and prestige of the United States in the region. He wants to establish Russia as the main Middle East power broker, and he wants to divert attention from his continued occupation of Ukraine.

In the long term, he sees an opportunity to divide EU and divide NATO at lower risk than it would take to conduct military operations such as Estonia or Latvia. If Europeans are going to be divided because of a refugee crisis of a few hundred thousand, imagine what could happen when Vladimir Putin turns up the heat in Syria and drives hundreds of thousands or more of those refugees into Europe.

How has this come to pass? Why would he think he could get away with all of this? Because of the unending se-

ries of concessions and appeasement of Barack Obama toward Vladimir Putin. Before he was even elected to office in 2008, when Vladimir Putin invaded Georgia, Barack Obama—then a candidate—called for Georgia to exercise restraint while they were under an invasion.

Just a couple of months later, he called for a reset in relations while there were still Russian troops on Georgian soil. A few months after that, he withdrew missile defense systems from the Czech Republic and Poland—on the 70th anniversary of Russia's invasion of Poland—without so much as a heads-up and without getting anything in return.

He entered into the New START treaty, which allows Russia to continue to grow their nuclear forces or requires the United States to reduce ours. In a "hot mic" moment, he was caught with Dmitry Medvedev, promising more flexibility toward Russia after the election of 2012. He fought tooth and nail against the Magnitsky human rights act, only accepting it once he realized it had overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress. He continues to look the other way as Russia violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. He jumped at the opportunity that Vladimir Putin provided him in 2013 to avoid carrying out his airstrikes in Syria and to enforce his own red line.

Just as in Georgia, when Vladimir Putin invaded Crimea, he demanded restraint from the government of Ukraine. When Vladimir Putin began to conduct operations in eastern Ukraine, he looked the other way, he imposed weak sanctions. To this day, he refuses to arm them in the ways they are desperately calling for.

So what should we do now? Again, I think it is very simple. Let me lay it out. We should make it clear that Vladimir Putin and Russia will not be a power in the Middle East. We should pressure our partners to do the same thing. We should establish no-fly zones in Syria and make it clear that any aircraft that enters those zones will be shot down. We should make it clear that we will fly where we want and when we want, that any aircraft in Syria—or, for that matter, in the vicinity of a NATO country—that turns on the transponder will be shot down as a menace to civil aviation and to our allies. We should ramp up our airstrikes in Syria against our enemies such as the Islamic State. We should threaten Iran with termination of the nuclear deal because they are continuing to provide support for Bashar al-Assad. We should make it clear that Israel retains the right to interdict missile shipments from Iran through Syria to the terrorist group Hezbollah.

Let's not forget about Ukraine and Europe. We should arm Ukrainian forces. We should give them the intelligence they need on Russian forces and rebels who are amassing on their border. We should enhance sanctions



by expanding them across all sectors. We should move troops to base them—at least temporarily, if not permanently—on our eastern NATO flank in places such as Estonia and Latvia.

Some say these responses will be provocative, but where will Putin's provocations end? What is really provocative is American weakness.

Putin is humiliating the United States. If we don't draw a line now and enforce it, it will not be a choice between humiliation or war; it will be a choice between humiliation and war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

#### LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I do wish to go back to the comments of the good Senator from New Hampshire on the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and I want to associate myself with those remarks.

I also wish to add for the record that there is a fair amount of this money that is spent for land acquisition from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. That is not a bad thing. Get some of the in-holdings out of being in-holdings. It helps with management, and it helps with management costs.

I will tell you, if you are a fisherman or a hunter in this country, access and habitat is a huge issue, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund is all about access for hunters, fishermen, bike riders, birdwatchers, and all those folks, and habitat for big game and fisheries.

For this fund to expire for the first time ever is a travesty. You are right. We spent \$306 million on it the last 2 years; we were supposed to have spent \$900 million in this fund, and that is why there is the reserve there is. Quite frankly, if you take a look at the United States, you take a look at the in-holdings, and you take a look at the recreational opportunities out there—\$306 million isn't enough. Yet this fund has expired and is not authorized.

In Montana alone, just for the record, recreational opportunities add \$6 billion, with a "b," to our economy. We are a State of 1 million people—\$6 billion to our economy. It employs over 64,000 people, and that doesn't count the businesses that moved to Montana for the recreational opportunities nor the people who come to work for those businesses for the recreational opportunities. I just wanted to get that into the RECORD.

Mr. President, I wish to talk about the bill under consideration, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, and I express my opposition to that bill.

Why? We just heard a presentation on the floor a minute ago from the Senator who talked about shooting down planes and potentially going to war. The amount that it costs to take care of our veterans is a cost of war, and we are underfunding the VA today by over \$800 million. I express my deep disappointment in the majority's in-

ability to recognize the true cost of sending this Nation, young men and women, into harm's way.

Veterans Day is 6 weeks from now. Many of the folks in this Chamber will go back to their home States where they will be attending ceremonies and taking photos of men and women who are in uniform. We will give speeches and talk about our profound gratitude to the veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for their country.

In the meantime, you will see a flurry of press statements from Senators, oftentimes patting themselves on their backs for extending benefits to veterans or enhancing the quality and timeliness of their care, or you will hear Senators and Congressmen lamenting on the lack of leadership within the VA and taking the VA to task for not performing up to their expectations. But there is one thing many of those Members of Congress will not do, and that is give the VA the resources it needs to serve the men and women who have served this country and the military.

Right now, the VA is under greater demand for services and subject to a higher degree of accountability than any other time in this Department's history. After a decade of war in the Middle East, that demand should be expected to be high. After recent allegations of mismanagement and wrongdoing, that accountability is absolutely warranted, but the standard we are holding the VA to should be the standard we hold ourselves to.

Is Congress doing the very best that it can do to ensure our Nation's veterans can access the health care and the benefits they have earned? Given the appropriations bill before us, the answer to that question is: No, we are not.

Our job is to make sure the VA is working for all veterans and to make sure it can work for all veterans. That means holding the VA accountable and ensuring it operates in full transparency, but that also means the VA has to have the capacity to meet the current needs of the demand for its services and to meet those demands into the future.

It requires rigorous oversight. Today's President understands that. There is no doubt about that, but it also requires giving the VA the tools and the resources it needs to get the job done.

Let's be clear. I believe this bill sets the VA up for failure. There are folks on the other side who are demanding that the VA fix itself, but in order to fix itself, we have to give it the tools it needs to do that. We are refusing to do that in this bill. We are setting up the VA for failure, and that failure will result in failing our veterans.

If this bill is enacted, it could mean that 68,500 fewer veterans are receiving the VA medical care they need, including veterans such as a constituent of mine from Reed Point, MT. This man

had an eye exam in early February and received a prescription for a new pair of glasses. He was told he would receive them in 4 to 6 weeks, but due to a large backlog, he did not receive them until July. It took 5 months to get this man glasses.

How are we going to improve the quality of care for veterans if the VA budget isn't where it needs to be?

Take the story of Perry, who is 67 years old. He has a 100-percent service disability due to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam. He relies on the VA for lifesaving cancer treatment. Without chemotherapy and specialty care, Perry's prognosis is not good. To make matters worse, the VA can approve only six appointments at a time, which is a real challenge for Perry because he is receiving treatment 5 days a week. So every week he has to fill out another round of paperwork to qualify for medical care.

These are real folks who served their country. They are veterans who have real issues with the VA today at current funding levels.

Do we think these problems are going to be easier to solve if we give them an underfunded budget? They won't be.

Over the last 14 years, we fought 2 wars in the Middle East. Almost 10,000 Americans are still involved in a fight in Afghanistan at this very moment. For them, this war is far from over, and for many people in this Chamber—some who led us into the war in Iraq—they refuse to admit these are also the true costs of war, taking care of our veterans.

When we send young men and women over there and we put these wars on America's credit card as we did—financed by China, Japan, and others—we do not bother to factor in what it would cost to meet their health care and educational requirements when they come back home. Honoring our commitment to veterans is a cost of war and one that we should never forget about. Those who came home are now suffering from physical wounds but also wounds we cannot see. As I said yesterday, at least 22 veterans are taking their own lives every single day, and \$1 billion less won't help the VA get these men and women back on their feet and give them the mental health care that they need.

The VA also faces unprecedented demand for new treatments of diseases such as hepatitis C, which are shorter in duration, with fewer side effects, and that have cure rates—and this is very good news—approaching 100 percent, but they cost money. As Vietnam veterans reach retirement age, that means that nearly half of this Nation's veteran population will be 65 years of age or older. They are entitled to their VA care. After all, they have earned it, and they are going to need more and more of that care in the years ahead.

My home State of Montana has the second highest per capita veterans population in this country. It is a rural State where distance poses a major obstacle to care. The Choice Act that we

passed and enacted last year was designed to address many of those obstacles that rural veterans face.

The VA is also working to establish residency programs in rural States to encourage rural medical providers to locate in those rural States. We need to build off of these efforts and work to ensure they are carried out as we intended and as the veterans deserve.

Will cutting pay for VA providers help bring more medical professionals to Montana or Alaska or Oklahoma or North Carolina? The answer is no.

I go home nearly every weekend, and when I travel around the State, I talk to veterans. They tell me that getting in the door of that VA can be very frustrating. Shortchanging the VA's medical facilities doesn't solve that problem. Not allowing the VA to hire more doctors and nurses doesn't solve that problem.

So today we need to fix this bill because the folks who sacrificed so much for this country deserve nothing less.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, all time is yielded back.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to calendar No. 98, H.R. 2029, an act making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Orrin G. Hatch, Thom Tillis, Tom Cotton, James Lankford, Shelley Moore Capito, Deb Fischer, Thad Cochran, John Barrasso, John Cornyn, Richard C. Shelby, Cory Gardner, Richard Burr, Jerry Moran, Jeff Flake, Steve Daines.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 2029, an act making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), and the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 273 Leg.]

#### YEAS—50

|           |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Alexander | Enzi      | Murkowski |
| Ayotte    | Ernst     | Paul      |
| Barrasso  | Fischer   | Perdue    |
| Blunt     | Flake     | Portman   |
| Boozman   | Gardner   | Risch     |
| Burr      | Grassley  | Roberts   |
| Capito    | Hatch     | Rounds    |
| Cassidy   | Heller    | Sasse     |
| Coats     | Hoeven    | Scott     |
| Cochran   | Inhofe    | Sessions  |
| Collins   | Isakson   | Shelby    |
| Corker    | Johnson   | Sullivan  |
| Cornyn    | Kirk      | Thune     |
| Cotton    | Lankford  | Tillis    |
| Crapo     | Lee       | Toomey    |
| Daines    | McConnell | Wicker    |
| Donnelly  | Moran     |           |

#### NAYS—44

|            |           |            |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Baldwin    | Heitkamp  | Peters     |
| Bennet     | Hirono    | Reed       |
| Blumenthal | Kaine     | Reid       |
| Booker     | King      | Sanders    |
| Brown      | Klobuchar | Schatz     |
| Cantwell   | Leahy     | Schumer    |
| Cardin     | Manchin   | Shaheen    |
| Carper     | Markey    | Stabenow   |
| Casey      | McCaskey  | Tester     |
| Coons      | Menendez  | Udall      |
| Durbin     | Merkley   | Warner     |
| Feinstein  | Mikulski  | Warren     |
| Franken    | Murphy    | Whitehouse |
| Gillibrand | Murray    | Wyden      |
| Heinrich   | Nelson    |            |

#### NOT VOTING—6

|       |        |        |
|-------|--------|--------|
| Boxer | Graham | Rubio  |
| Crux  | McCaIn | Vitter |

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 44.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and related agencies appropriations bill. I am very encouraged that has finally come before the U.S. Senate. I also wish to remind my colleagues that the Senate Appropriations Committee has put forward 12 appropriations bills that reflect the priorities of the American people and the budget we passed in April.

Let me remind my colleagues that budget took \$7 trillion out of the President's proposed budget over the next 10 years. Yet here we are today, in October, facing the reality that since April we have not been able to debate on this floor those 12 appropriations bills. You have heard all year that we need to get back to regular order, and that means the Senate needs to bring up and debate each of these 12 bills individually.

However, due to Democratic obstructionism, the Federal Government is operating under a short-term funding measure, and the Senate has not been able to debate any of these 12 funding bills.

It is time for the political posturing to stop. People back home don't understand. I don't either. Senate Democrats are again acting as a roadblock in preventing progress. The American people sent us to govern responsibly, and it is time for Senate Democrats to start living up to this expectation, particularly when it comes to funding our government.

In this vote today, Senate Democrats are blocking us from moving forward with a bill to fund military construction projects that help our troops and support key veterans programs, many of which need reform after being plagued by backlogs and scandals for years.

We must make good on our Nation's promise to our veterans and provide our troops with the facilities they need to work, train, and fulfill the mission of the U.S. Armed Forces. Senate Democrats just voted against improvements to the VA electronic health records system so that veterans' records are safely and seamlessly accessed among agencies and the private sector. They just voted against increased transparency for the VA disability claims system to reduce the backlog for those veterans who need help the most. They just voted against much needed oversight of VA construction projects, like the VA hospital in Denver, CO, that is over \$1 billion over budget. Additionally, they just voted against construction of the second missile defense site in Poland, a project that is an important deterrent against Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and had been previously scrapped by President Obama.

Our Nation is currently dealing with a global security crisis. We must take recent Russian aggressions and the rise of great power traditional rivals very seriously. Yesterday Russia launched airstrikes in Syria to prop up President Bashar Al Assad in a strategy Defense Secretary Ash Carter described as counterproductive and equated to "pouring gasoline on the fire." Clearly, we must make sure our troops have the resources they need to protect our country. Because of that, I am shocked that my colleagues across the aisle today just voted to delay construction for our military facilities—facilities our troops depend on to train for current conflicts and to prepare for whatever the future holds.

Most appalling of all, Senate Democrats voted today to block this bill even after we learned that tens of thousands of our veterans have died while waiting for care they need and deserve. This is unconscionable, and the brinkmanship we are seeing from Senate Democrats across the aisle is totally unacceptable.

Our veterans sacrificed so much for our freedom, and our service men and



women are currently putting their lives in jeopardy every day for us and our families. We cannot fail them. This bipartisan Federal funding bill does a lot of important things for our Nation, but most importantly it supports our American heroes. Like most of my colleagues, I have traveled this year and met with our fighting women and men on frontlines. The very best of Americans are in uniform today, and they deserve our full support.

Today I call on my colleagues across the aisle to stop blocking these important bills. Let's get them on the floor and negotiate—compromise if we have to but get to a conclusion where we can fund the men and women defending our freedom. We now have 72 days to return to regular order and debate these important appropriations bills so the priorities of our veterans, our military, and the American people can once and for all be restored. I sincerely hope that all the colleagues in this body will not disappoint the American people yet again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 1735.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The report will be stated by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 1735), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 29, 2015.)

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 1735, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

John McCain, Bob Corker, John Hoeven, Ron Johnson, Dan Sullivan, Steve Daines, Richard Burr, Joni Ernst, Deb Fischer, Tim Scott, Orrin G. Hatch, Shelley Moore Capito, Mike Crapo, Tom Cotton, Cory Gardner, Kelly Ayotte, Mitch McConnell.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SHOOTING AT UMPQUA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, before I proceed to the consideration of a colloquy with my colleague from Wisconsin, I just wanted to take a moment. My colleague from Wisconsin brought to my attention that there are news reports that have just come out of a tragic mass shooting at a community college in Oregon. I believe it is called Umpqua Community College.

I just wanted to ask all who might be watching or are with us in the Chamber to keep in your thoughts and prayers the families of the victims, which number somewhere around 10, and of the wounded, somewhere around 20, and to also keep the first responders and students and faculty and our colleagues who represent the State of Oregon and all who have been affected by this tragedy in Oregon in your thoughts and prayers. It is just now being reported.

I appreciate the forbearance of my colleague and the Chair and the other Members present for my taking a moment just to bring that to everyone's attention.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I might enter into a colloquy with my colleague from Wisconsin.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NATIONAL MANUFACTURING DAY

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in marking National Manufacturing Day, which will be celebrated across the country tomorrow.

The simple fact is that manufacturing has been and continues to be a vital part of our economy. But coming from the State of Delaware, I know firsthand the challenges manufacturing has faced in the 20th century and the challenges it continues to face today.

Almost every day I ride the Amtrak train from Wilmington, DE, to Wash-

ington, DC, and as I look out the window as we pass through the city of Newark, DE, I see the site of the old Chrysler assembly plant. Each time I see it, I think about what it was like going to the plant gates and visiting with friends and family and the thousands of men and women who worked shifts for decades at this tremendous automobile manufacturing plant that made the Durango and, for decades before that, other models.

Every time I see that site, which has now been leveled and is now being rebuilt, I am reminded that for decades there were men and women there who had one thing in common—good-paying, steady, high-quality manufacturing jobs. Chrysler, General Motors, and other manufacturers, which used to be at the center of my State's economy, each employing thousands of Delawareans, are today gone, and many families and many of our communities still feel the impact of those losses. But for the thousands of Delawareans who grew up with friends and family working every day at GM, Chrysler, the steel mill, the Avon plant or other now-gone manufacturing sites across our State, it is easy to be skeptical about the prospects for a revival of American manufacturing.

I am here today with my colleague from the State of Wisconsin to tell our fellow Americans that despite those harsh realities, there are real reasons for hope. Manufacturing still supports 25,000 jobs in my State. Since 2010, our economy, the growing American manufacturing sector, has created 870,000 new jobs. As production costs have gone up in our competitors—countries such as China—and as the key input cost of energy has steadily come down, businesses have seen over the last decade that more reliable financial, legal, and engineering structures and resources, and cheaper energy here in the United States have made American manufacturing more competitive than it has been in decades.

Just as important as the number of jobs created in the manufacturing sector is the quality and compensation for those jobs. American manufacturing is also responsible today for three-quarters of all private sector research and development, just illustrating once again how innovative this sector has always been. To stay ahead and to thrive in the modern-world economy, manufacturing has to be on the cutting edge.

While American manufacturing is resurgent today, there is much more we can do together to build on this momentum. That is why Senator BALDWIN and I are leading a campaign called Manufacturing Jobs for America, to focus on four key areas where we together can strengthen American manufacturing—first by investing in America's workforce; second, by expanding access to capital; third, by opening up markets abroad; and fourth, by creating the conditions necessary for growth.